

(U) History Today - 31 July 2013



(U) One of the first major long-distance bombing raids conducted by the U.S. Army Air Force in World War II was against the German-held oil fields at Ploesti in Rumania. The raid was launched on August 1, 1943.

(U) As it happened, German signals intelligence was able to pick up a lot of clues about the impending action.

(U) SIGINT units of the German Air Force High Command in Italy were monitoring the communications of the U.S. Ninth Bomber Command, operating out of Benghazi, Libya. The high volume of traffic related to practice missions in the last few weeks of June indicated that an unusual bombing raid was being planned.

(U) Just before the raid was launched on August 1, U.S. voice communications indicated to the Germans that a long-range flight by bombers was about to begin. Maintaining continuity on U.S. communications, the Germans followed the bombers on their normal course to Italy and then the sudden turn to the northeast. German SIGINT continued to locate the bombers as they flew over the Balkan region.

(U) In the early hours of the 1st, the Ploesti region went on alert. Fighter aircraft from nearby locations reinforced normal defenses at Ploesti.

(U) When U.S. planes were hit by German fire, they broadcast distress messages in the clear as they returned to base. This allowed German units along the route back from Rumania to Libya to locate and attack them.

(U) In the battle and its aftermath, the Germans downed fifty-three aircraft and there was a heavy toll in aircrews lost.

(U) There were many reasons for the heavy American losses in the Ploesti raid. However, it is apparent that poor communications security contributed significantly to the losses.

(U) The photograph shows an American bomber at Ploesti.

(U) Can't get enough cryptologic history? Come blog with us at [*History Rocks*](#). (go history rocks)

(U) [Larger view of photo](#)

(U) Have a question or comment on "History Today"? Contact us at DL cch or cch@nsa.

[Comments/Suggestions about this article?](#)